

What is the church meant to 'look like'?

1 Timothy 3:14-15

This is the reason why Paul wrote this letter.

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.



This letter was written before denominations existed



About
63 AD

The church's evolving structure

The Building analogy

Matthew 16:18 on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.



Ephesians 2:19-21 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

The church's evolving structure

The Body analogy

Romans 12:4-5 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body--whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.



There is Only One Head- the Lord Jesus Christ

Ephesians 5:23 Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.

We see believers also called His bride

Revelation 19:7-8 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."
(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)



It began with Apostles and other believers

Acts 1:14-15 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

At Pentecost 3000 were added!

Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.



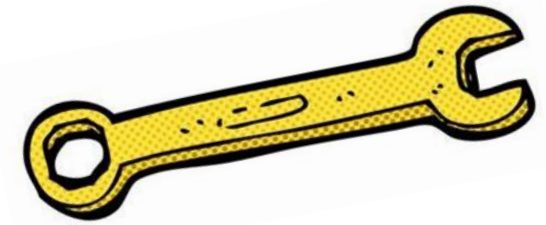
Was there a membership list?

Church practice at the beginning

Acts 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.



Developments in administration



Acts 6:1-6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Leaders' names

As the gospel spread - individual congregations established with local plural leadership of elders.

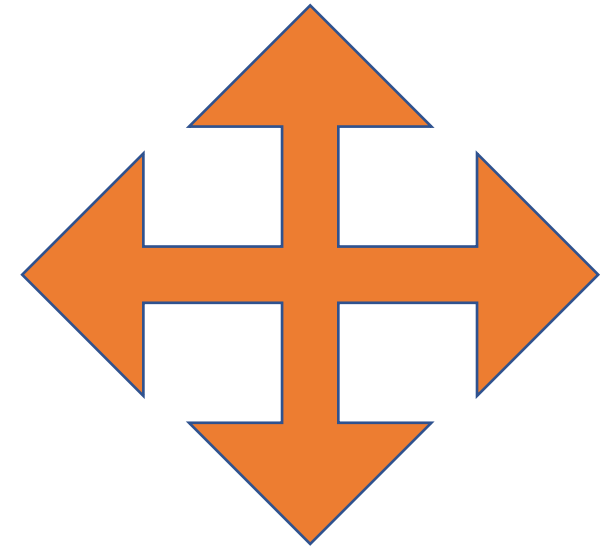
The had two words describing different functions: elders (presbyters) and bishops (over-seers)

Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.



These were “independent” congregations meeting in homes (Philemon 1:2), halls(Acts 19:9) in different towns and cities. To begin with, they didn’t have church buildings.

There was quite a degree of inter-congregational contact as appears from Acts and the letters with travelling ministries (cf. John’s letters) and with reasonable ease of travel in those times (cf. the gathering at Pentecost, the people Paul mentions in his letters.



Acts 15:23 With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.

The church was united under the one Shepherd – Jesus

John 10:16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

1Peter 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.



Other leaders were seen as 'under-shepherds'

Peter says:-

1 Peter 5:1-2 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be;

Paul says:-

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

All the churches were united under the leadership of the apostles. We see mostly Peter and Paul in Acts but the other apostles played important roles too.

According to tradition, Thomas took the gospel of Christ to the subcontinent of India. Various historical records and traditions indicate that Thomas travelled by sea to India in AD 52. He was later martyred and buried there after witnessing to the Indian people. The tomb of St. Thomas is in Mylapore, India.



The structure of the church was established for the times subsequent to the apostles:-

- 1, Individual Congregations united under the headship of God through the Lord Jesus.
- 2, The Holy Spirit's guidance and empowering of each individual member with various gifts.
- 3, The authority of the OT scriptures and the apostolic teaching -> NT
- 4, Elders and deacons (servant leadership) and congregation

What came later ...

In the following ages of the church different structures came in, mostly authoritarian in nature with a hierarchical structure - eg ... popes → bishops → priests → laity etc.

Also there were different doctrinal emphases:- Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Baptist, Congregational, Pentecostal etc. etc.

All of these have focused on some aspect of the truth and emphasised it. And God can still work in them to some degree!
Praise the Lord!

But there is the danger of the temptation to misuse power and politics and to consider others as semi- heretical. (We've got it right!)

Having the perfect structure won't produce a perfect church!

In order to function in a God-honouring way in its worship and witness it needs a people growing in the grace of God with godly leaders.

It is the spiritual quality of all these people that make it work.

Without it, the right structure with unqualified people will fail.



This brings us to Paul's instructions to Timothy.

It's quality that counts.



Elder/Overseer/Bishop

Here is a trustworthy saying.. If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.



Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife,

Male
Married?
(single – multiple wives?)



Now the overseer must be :-

temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.



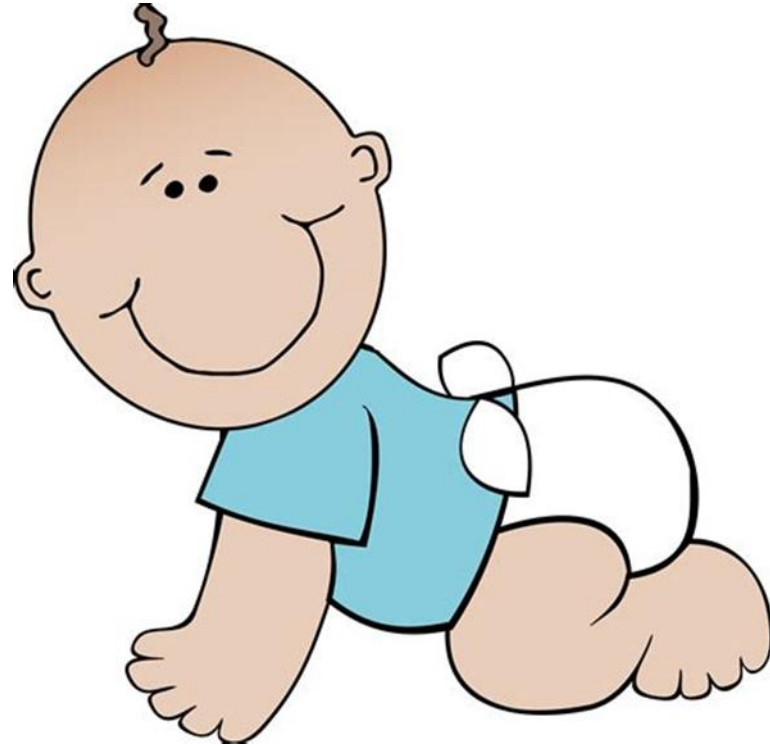
Now the overseer must :-

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God`s church?)



Now the overseer must :-

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.



Now the overseer must :-

He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil`s trap.

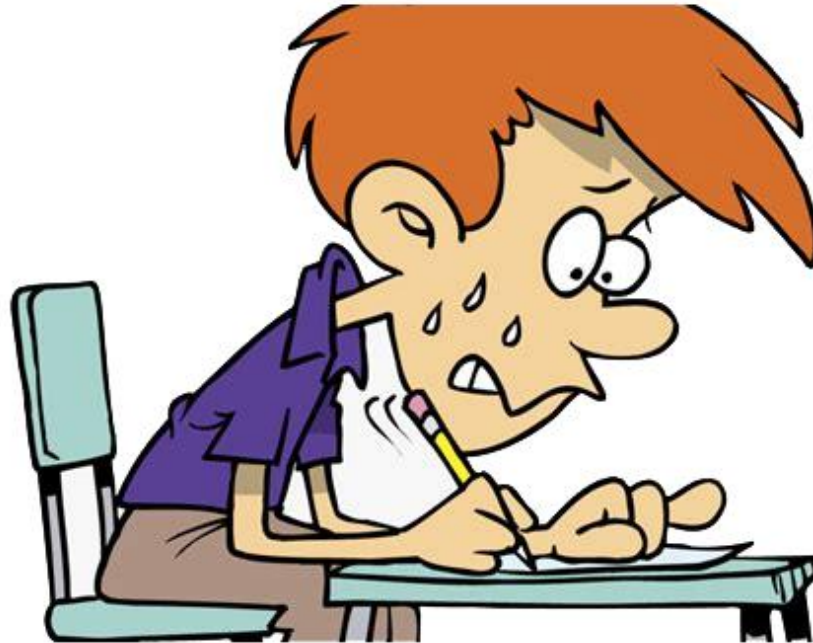


Deacons

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.



They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.



In the same way, their wives (deacons?) are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

Cf. Phoebe etc. women workers

Romans 16:1-2 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.

Monogamy and good order in the home.



Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.



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